

Lesson Objective: Students will learn about *Kalila and Dimna*, a collection of fables, and compare one of its stories with a folio from Ashmole Bestiary to learn about parables from ancient times onwards for didactic purposes in the World's Literature

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Studies on Persianate Manuscripts, Arts, and Literature

Illustration: Courtesy of The Egyptian Museum, The Bodleian Library.

Source: PELLECCIA, LINDA. "FROM AESOP'S FABLES TO THE 'KALILA WA-DIMNA': GIULIANO DA SANGALLO'S STAIRCASE IN THE GONDI PALACE IN FLORENCE." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 14/15, 2011, pp. 137–207. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41781525. Accessed 4 Aug. 2020.

Kalila va Dimna

When Khosrow Anushirvan, known as Khosrow I, one of the rulers of the Sasanian empire (531-579 CE), sent his famous physician Burzoe to India to gather Sanskrit books of knowledge for the purpose of translation to the Persian language, Burzoe returned with a copy of *Panchatantra* later translated as *Kalila va dimna*. *Panchatantra (Five Discourses)* was originally written in Sanskrit around four-century A.D. It was written as a mirror for princes to enlighten three young princes and provide them with practical wisdom. It consists of long tales told to the legendary king Dabishlim by his trusted advisor, Bidpai. The king usually asked a question, and then the advisor answered it in the form of a story to instruct the art of virtue and prudence.

According to apocryphal tales, Burzoe asked Anushirvan for permission to travel to India, searching for the plant of immortality. After an unsuccessful search for the plant, Burzoe met a mystic and asked him about "the mountain with a plant which can revive the dead," the mystic explained to him that the plant is "words of the book of Kalila," the mountain is "learning," and the dead is the "ignorant." The mystic revealed to Burzoe that he could find Kalila's book in the treasure chamber of the king of India. Thus, Burzoe could copy the text and send it to Persia.

In the eighth century, C.E. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d.757 CE) translated the book to Arabic and added some stories into his translation, known as *Karirak ud Damanak*. In the introduction, Ibn al-Muqaffa' underscored that the book's purpose is to engage the youth by using animal fables, entertain the princes through the detailed depictions and illustrations, entice the ordinary folks, and engage the intellectuals in unraveling the wisdom of the stories.

Medieval bestiaries are created as a didactic mirror for humans, and in the reception of bestiaries, animals are often associated with fears of the gender and ethnic Other. Moralizations, animal lore, natural science, and theology are all parts of the bestiaries' teaching, which is always accompanied by the protagonists' and antagonists' delightful imagery. Thus, animal fables were created to promote a "common moral culture" for people.

From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, *Kalila va dimna* was translated into Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and Castilian. Giovanni da Capua executed the most significant Latin translation of the book between 1294 and 1303 for Cardinal Orsini. *Liber Kelile et Dimne* then spread throughout Europe as a book of parables of ancient wisdom. During 1480-1493 other translations of the book appeared under the title of *A Guide to Human Life or Parables of Ancient Wisdom (Directorium humanae vitae alias parabola antiquorum sapientium)* translated and edited by Johann Pruss in Strasbourg. Thus, the title that the book was identified with

"*Kalila va Dimne*," which was changed to other formats like *The Book of Examples of Ancient Wisdom*.



“In a vast jungle, once lived a lion who hunted animals and abused his power. One day, all the animals agreed to supply him daily by choosing one among themselves and sending him as his food to stop his cruelty. The trade continued until one day, a hare decided to go against everybody’s wishes and destroy the lion. The hare arrived late and explained that he was bringing another hare for the lion’s lunch when he saw a new lion in the neighborhood snatched that hare and ate him immediately. He also told the lion that the new lion in the neighborhood said that he was the jungle’s new king. When the lion of the story heard the hare, he asked the hare to show him the new lion since he wished to destroy him. The hare took him to a deep well full of water and noted: look here, my king. As they both perched over the well, the lion saw his reflection and thought it was the new lion. Thus, he leaped in and drowned. Animals of the jungle rejoiced after that.”



Tiger (Folio 12v). A mother tiger is distracted by a mirror in which she thinks she sees her stolen cub, while the hunter escapes with the cub. (Photo credit: The [Medieval Bestiary](#))

Online Manuscript:

<http://treasures.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/The-Ashmole-Bestiary>

The Ashmole Bestiary has a folio with the story of a tiger chasing the hunter who is taking the tiger's cub. The hunter throws a mirror in the tiger's way, and as the tiger is enraptured with the fair image in the mirror, thinking the image is the cub, the hunter flees with the tiger's cub. Bestiary images were carved on panels, friezes, staircases, and misericords for visitors to decode the fables, contemplate the messages and create their narratives. Bestiaries can also be credited as the primary sources inspiring animations' creation.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451480?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&deptids=14&ft=manuscripts+fable+of+Bidpai&offset=0&rpp=20&p;pos=5>

<https://michelinewalker.com/2013/03/01/the-ashmole-bestiary/>

<https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/pdf/neh5070b2327739.pdf>

Describe each of the folios' subject matter while comparing and contrasting them.

Do you know any of the stories of Aesop's Fables? Examine the link below on Aesop's Fables.

Can you explain one of the ancient stories regarding animals in the class? What did you learn from the story?

<http://bestiary.ca/prisources/psdetail1214.htm>

Terms:

Bestiary

Didactic

Fables

Misericords

Anushirvan

Burzoe